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Conflicts and resource politics in Myanmar : An analytical report of the public seminar on 15 August 2018 in Helsinki, Finland

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Conflicts and resource politics in Myanmar

An analytical report of the public seminar
on 15 August 2018 in Helsinki, Finland



Summary

Myanmar is experiencing a complicated transition towards a civilian government, multi-party democratic elections, and peace negotiations. At the same time, the recent opening of the country has resulted in an accelerating rush for the rich natural resources in the form of extractive industrial and agribusiness projects. Despite the ongoing peace-processes, manifold differently scaled conflicts continue to emerge throughout the country. Many of those relate to disputes over land deals and resource control. The customary rights of small holders have become undermined and the legal frameworks on land governance and property regimes remain contested.

On 15 August 2018, a seminar organized by Siemenpuu Foundation, Felm and the University of Helsinki was held to share knowledge and viewpoints on conflicts and resource politics in Myanmar.

This report reiterates the political and practical insights discussed in the seminar around how conflicts in the ethnic states are often entangled with resource politics. Moreover, report discusses how land, forest and water rights could be addressed as part of conflict resolution towards sustainable peace in Myanmar. The seminar focused especially on the developments in the ethnic states of Shan and Karen in the Northeastern and Eastern parts of the country. The concepts of expulsion (Sassen 2014) and cease-fire capitalism (Woods 2011) are used to foreground the key insights more analytically.

The report underscores that more attention should be paid on how, and with what costs, the recent growth in the country has been generated and how the benefits and burdens are distributed. The current processes of resource-making are likely to intensify the expulsions of smallholders and ethnic minorities from their livelihoods and fuel new resource conflicts especially in the ethnic states where most of the valuable resources are located. Donor countries like Finland, which want to advance peace and prosperity in Myanmar, are encouraged to support democratization of the governance of natural resources and processes that strengthen the recognition and protection of customary land and forest tenure rights of ethnic communities.

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Cover photo:

Valley of Kloklaw Lorklo stream (tributary of the Salween river) in Northern Mutraw District of Karen State. Photo courtesy of KESAN.

1. Introduction

Myanmar (formerly known as Burma) has population of 50-60 million people. About 40% of this population belong to ethnic minorities. The country is perhaps most known by its 50 years of military rule in 1962-2011. Still, after the beginning of a New Democratic Era from 2016, the rule of law remains rather thin and military's grip on power is significant (McCarthy 2018). For example, the Myanmar Armed Forces, *Tatmadaw*, oversees some of the key ministries. One-fourth of the parliament members are appointed by it. At the same time, characteristic to Myanmar's system of rule, the central government (previously military, now more civilian Union government) has never been the sole sovereign within the country. Currently, Ethnic Armed Groups have a stronghold in many of the ethnic states. In many cases, they also enjoy considerable political legitimacy from the ethnic communities they seek to represent. Nevertheless, in some cases, they demonstrate "warlord-like" tendencies by pursuing private economic gains (South 2018). The peace processes continue to be complicated and the grievances in the conflict-affected areas remain acute.

The current economic growth is significantly based on extractive projects. The recent opening of the country has brought in new investors seeking opportunities in the 'last frontier of Asia'. The valuable resources for large-scale extractive projects are importantly located in the ethnic states and many of the conflicts are thus entangled with the questions of access to and control over resources. Concerns have been raised whether the current extractive development model is able to bring welfare and just economic development for all. Myanmar is the most rural country in Southeast Asia and the clear majority of its population are smallholders whose livelihood mosaic consists of land based agricultural activities supplemented with forest-based and riverine activities. The extractive projects are often detrimental to these livelihoods. While the local residents bear the brunt of these projects, they rarely gain significant benefits from them.

On 15 August 2018, the ways how the resource politics entangle with the peace process in Myanmar and how the resource governance could be democratised, were discussed at the Think Corner of the University of Helsinki (See Annex 1 for the detailed program). The speakers were **Carl Middleton** (Chulalongkorn University), **Glenn Hunt** (Land Core Group), **Khu Khu Ju** (Land in Our Hands) and **Kyi Phyo** (Mekong Energy and Ecology Network). Insightful comments to their presentations were heard from **Thuzar Thant** and **Harn Yawngnhwe** (both from Euro-Burma Office) as well as from **David Korpela** and **Petri Wanner** (both from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland) (See Annex 2 for the short biographies of the invited foreign speakers).

The second part of the event was dedicated to a panel discussion on the role of the Finnish actors in Myanmar. Myanmar is currently one of Finland's three partner countries in bilateral [development cooperation](#) in Asia along with Nepal and Afghanistan. The priority sectors or areas of support in Myanmar include the peace process and democratic governance, sustainable forest management and education. Also, many Finnish civil society organisations have started collaborations within the

country. There are signs that also private sector actors might be considering the possibilities in the opening economy of Myanmar. In the Finnish universities, different collaborations have been developed in forest, energy and water related research and capacity building. The present and future role of Finnish development cooperation as well as the role of private sector actors was debated by **Riikka Laatu** (Finland's Ambassador to Myanmar), **Pasi Rajala** (Finnfund), **Kristiina Rintakoski** (Felm), **Juhani Klemetti** (Siemenpuu Foundation) and **Esko Korkiakoski** (Geological Survey of Finland, GTK).

[The seminar](#) was organised by [Development Studies, University of Helsinki](#) in collaboration with [Felm](#) and [Siemenpuu Foundation](#). The video recording of the event is available [here](#) and the presentations can be downloaded from [here](#). Twitter discussion can be found with the hashtag #ThinkMyanmar2018.

This report reiterates the political and practical insights discussed in the seminar around how conflicts in the ethnic states are often entangled with resource politics. Moreover, the report discusses how land, forest and water rights could be addressed as part of conflict resolution towards sustainable peace in Myanmar. The seminar focused especially on the developments in the ethnic states of Shan and Karen in the Northeastern and Eastern parts of the country. The concepts of expulsion (Sassen 2014) and cease-fire capitalism (Woods 2011) are used to foreground the key insights more analytically.

2. Making sense of Myanmar's resource politics

In her publication (2014), a sociologist of global economy Saskia Sassen shows that the intertwining of what is global and local in the internationally operating markets makes the governance of land, forests and water increasingly intricate. Tracing the lines of responsibility over evictions, displacements and eradications becomes easily blurred. Also in Myanmar, spatially complex assemblages and networks are at play in the extractive operations of natural resources. Along with the international capital investments, there are the military and state actors, various forms of legal and engineering expertise, ethnic armies and a plurality of overlapping land tenure systems.

According to Sassen, what connects versatile people and processes operating at the frontiers of global economy is the logic of *expulsion*. Expulsion is the organizing logic driving differentiated environmental and social challenges. Expulsions do not abide state borders; a point exemplified by land grabbing that also takes place in Myanmar. The ways land and resource deals relate to state formation processes can be complex (Lund 2011, Kähkönen and Thuon 2018).

On one hand, large-scale land deals may undermine state sovereignty as concession zones often become exempted from state oversight, and, on the other, the governments are increasingly shaping laws and policies so that international businesses can gain local access and thrive. The land and resource deals may, however, in different ways also further state territorialisation as shown by Woods (2011) in the

case of Myanmar. Thus, land deals occur in different kinds of hybrids of state powers, local elites and international business or financial institutions. In Myanmar the cease-fire deals, the role of Ethnic Armed Groups and the different para-military groups complicate the picture further. What is clear, however, is that these resource deals seem to be systematically undermining the rights of local smallholders, forest users and fishers. Therefore, avoiding expulsions can be argued to be general, yet analytically sharp, condition for sustainable and democratic use of resources in the context of Myanmar.

Myanmar is not a new (non-conquered) frontier. It is true that the recent opening has brought in new actors, investors and legislative initiatives. But extractive projects in many parts of the country have much longer history. In the past decades the national economy and natural resource governance has been shaped by the long but on-going conflicts and the negotiation processes aiming for peace. During the military regime, Burmese military aimed continuously to gain control over the territories and the rich resources in the ethnic states. Scott (2009) theorizes that the ethnic upland areas have a long history of being peripheral to state rule (from the lowland centres) dating back to colonial and pre-colonial times. In the early 1990s the Burmese military government began to use concessionary resource deals to establish territorial control over the 'unruly' Burma-China borderlands. Woods (2011) conceptualizes the relationships of military state formation, land control and securitization as 'cease-fire capitalism'. While the peace process has advanced in many fronts since 2011, and especially after 2015, the logic of cease-fire capitalism seems to prevail.

Nowadays, along with the military, Chinese investors and Ethnic Armed Organizations, there is the new Union government as well as a more versatile group of international investors and development actors shaping the expanding resource-based economy. Thus, the ceasefire capitalism of Myanmar is co-constructed through an interplay of national and international businesses and ethnic political elites and state/military actors. It aims not only to enforce state presence in some of the ethnic states but also to boost economic growth. Advancing peace has created particular geographical zones within the country characterized by cease-fire but also increasing and rapidly evolving contestation over the governance of natural resources and land. For potential investors it is important to understand that when operating in ceasefire zones they are likely to become involved in the conflicts one way or the other as state and military actors (as well as ethnic armed groups) might be channelling their funds to further state presence and dominance over the frontier territories.

Overall, our report highlights that the joint analysis of peace process and evolving natural resources governance with different sectors of resource extractivism seems to gain further analytical insight through the concepts of expulsion and cease-fire capitalism. The approach furthers the understanding of the contestations of authority between military, other state institutions and instruments and Ethnic Armed Organisations. Furthermore, it draws attention to the ways various resource deals are pushed forward by interests ranging from profit-making to state power consolidation that are, nonetheless, characterized by the expulsion logic and its effects of dispossession.

3. Key seminar insights: Present challenges and alternative pathways

The concepts introduced above foreground the challenges that were discussed in the seminar in terms of the dispossessionary and unequal economic growth pattern fuelling conflicts. Inspired by the pathways approach (Leach et al. 2010, used also by Carl Middleton in his presentation), each section is structured around a present challenge and an alternative pathways to provide information about current dilemmas and how they could be addressed in a way that would pave the way for more sustainable future.

Challenge 1: Growth through dispossessions and with little trickle-down effects

Present challenges: The questions of whose peace and whose land, water and forests, were raised in one way or another by all presenters. The answers cast shadow over the current economic growth pattern in Myanmar. While the annual growth rate stands at staggering 7-8%, this growth has been partly generated by dispossessions of many smallholders. Furthermore, the profits have been accumulating in the hands of those with most economic, political or military-based power already. In other words, Myanmar has been experiencing economic growth but very little of what might be characterized as long-term sustainable economic development (Park, 2014). The opening documentary film "This Land is our Land" by Sai Kong Kham raised the question in a stark manner by showcasing the implications of a coal project that had resulted in the expulsion of local residents. For those displaced, the situation was bleak as no job opportunities were there and, furthermore, the material basis of livelihood was lost. Such conflict-enforcing displacements are likely to occur in Myanmar in the future if the extractive development intensifies as more than 70% of the population are dependent on the lands, forests and fisheries found in their surroundings.

More sustainable pathways: The extraction of natural resources is not determined to proceed in such coercive manner, however. The point in case is the Salween river basin. Kyi Phyo pointed out that the total planned hydropower capacity of Salween river in Myanmar stands at 15 970 MW (fivefold to the installed hydropower production capacity of whole Finland¹) and most of the produced electricity would be sold to Thailand and China. Currently 5 mainstream dams are planned within Myanmar: three in Shan state, one in Karen and another in Kayah state. The dams could contribute to and trigger violent conflicts as already witnessed in 2014 and 2016 near the planned Hatgyi dam in Karen State (Suhardiman et al. 2017). Nevertheless, as Kyi Phyo and Carl Middleton showed, the damming of Nu-Thanlwin-Salween River is not predetermined and the development of the basin can take multiple different kinds of actualizations. Myanmar shares the basin with China and Thailand but, according to Middleton, in Myanmar alone one can find a complex mosaic of claims for political authority, legitimacy and territory in the ethnic states of the Salween basin. Elite groups are pushing for large dams to be built before a solution to peace between the state and

¹ https://energia.fi/perustietoa_energia-alasta/energiantuotanto/sahkontuotanto/vesivoima

the ethnic groups is complete. At the same time, however, there are other groups that pursue completion of the peace process first as a precondition for a deliberation of the future development options

Kyi Phyo summarized that “[D]epending on the pathway followed, there will be a greater or lesser impact on the environment, and just or unjust in terms of the distribution of benefits and costs in society”. The crux of the matter is about the democratization of, natural resource extraction projects so that the people to be most affected would have stronger say over the future they want to have and witness betterment in their wellbeing. As Middleton highlighted, more sustainable pathways could be built on the examples that already exist. The example, of an inspiring initiative that could guide towards more just and sustainable future, is [Salween Peacepark](#). It is an initiative of community representatives, Karen Environmental and Social Action Network (KESAN) and local district representatives of the Karen National Union. It is built on the vision of self-governance and it promotes locally-defined sustainable development and designated areas for wildlife sanctuaries, community forests and customary land areas in place of extractive hydropower dams and gold mines (Suhardiman et al. 2017, Middleton and Götz 2018). It is a people-centered alternative to destructive development and it promotes peace in an area with tragic history of violence.

According to Kyi Phyo, there are several options for electricity production in Myanmar and potential for alternatives to replace most of the planned large-scale hydropower and coal-power projects. In the central Dry Zone of Myanmar, almost 1500 MW solar power projects are under construction or planned to provide electricity into the national grid. Opportunities for wind energy production have been identified in several areas of Myanmar. Furthermore, local communities across several states and regions already now run their community-based micro and mini grids, especially with very small hydropower installations (totalling almost 6000 plants) in hilly and mountainous regions. At the same time, some of the Ethnic States are pursuing more sustainable energy pathways. For example, the Shan Parliament is in process to enact a ‘Green Energy Law’ to steer the Shan State towards more decentralised and sustainable electricity production.

Challenge 2. The contested ownership of lands: grabbing and displacement

Present challenges: The increase of new natural resource-oriented businesses has changed the very foundation how land and its tenure is understood and enacted especially among the peasant farmers in the ethnic states of Myanmar. For many, the concept of private land ownership is alien as land traditionally has belonged to whom utilizes it. Furthermore, as land and its natural resources are becoming economized through markets, it turns those resources into tradable commodities not necessarily being accessible for the peasants themselves. As a result, Khu Khu Ju alleged that there were 2500 cases of land grabbing in 2010 alone. She continued by bringing forth how the Myanmar state/military actors are using land deals for advancing the state territorialisation of ethnic states. These politics of land deals are starkly at odds with [the meanings of land](#) that stem from the cultural practices and identities of those

inhabiting and tilling the land. Khu Khu Ju quoted a farmer from Dawsoshay village, Demoso Township, Kayah State: "Land has very deep meaning and value for us. It is our lives and the very blood in our veins. Without our land, our nationality will vanish. Land is our dignity."

Many instruments of land governance disregard the actual practices of peasant small holders whose livelihoods are dependent on the uses of forests and aquatic ecosystems. Glenn Hunt's presentation gave an overview of these historically layered and overlapping governance systems of land. He emphasized that the legislative framework governing land acquisition and all new land laws passed in 2012 have been skewed disproportionately in favour of the Myanmar state, the military and companies. Furthermore, the land reform process has advanced sluggishly. Consequently, the law pays limited attention to the rights of people and communities. For instance, he demonstrated how the traditional modes of using forests in the rotational cultivation of crops are not recognized in existing forest and land laws. Indeed, the local livelihoods depending on the forests are not secured by the forest law. The ownership of forests has been centralized to Forest Department of the state, and consequently, even the projects that supposedly promote environmentally sustainable forestry are at risk of legitimizing the expulsion of the peasant farmers and shifting cultivators.

Although foreign investment in the agricultural sector is low compared to e.g. garment sector and mining, the land allocated to large-scale agricultural concessions still increased by 170 percent from 2010-13 (Woods 2015). In addition, the Government of Myanmar is not equipped with clear mechanisms how to resolve land use conflicts. Instead, it is continuing to fuel conflicts by allowing more land deals to take place in some of the already conflict-ridden ethnic states

More sustainable pathways: Both Hunt and Khu Khu Ju emphasised that secured land tenure for smallholders and recognition of customary land and forest rights is the first step towards more just and peaceful future. Here the National Land Use Policy 2016 is a positive sign. Although not legally binding is promising in offering guidance on number of key issues like customary land and forest tenure. So far its implementation has been rather weak, but its strengthening could foster just access to, and tenure of, land, and hence eventually also peace. Attention should be paid also to the land reinvestigations committee of Myanmar in its efforts of sorting the mess of colonial era modes of natural resource governance and the land grabs of the socialist and military era.

Better land use policies can also raise from the grass roots. The impacted communities are not passive victims but are actively advocating for their rights. The various civil society groups in Myanmar are creating supportive networks and public debate over the land conflicts. This all could strengthen their case of securing land for the people, life and dignity. Khu Khu Ju also raised that there are land policy initiatives in the ethnic states that hold some promises for enhanced recognition of the customary land and forest tenure. Thus far, only Karen National Union has finalised its own land policy, but Kayah, Kachin and Mon States have their own land policies in the process.

Challenge 3: The unequal status quo in the peace process

Present challenges: Several panellists, commentators and members of the audience expressed their worries and disappointments to the slowly progressing peace processes. The violence and mass atrocities against Rohingya and serious violation against civilians in the Northern states of Kachin and Shan make the current situation in many respects alarming. It seems clear that, at least in the Northern and Eastern States of Kachin, Shan, Kayah and Karen, the extractive projects promoted or backed by the state/military have led to increased number of resource-based conflicts. Questions were raised whether foreign investments and different forms of official development aid end up strengthening the regime. At least it is clear that the Union government as well as the international community have failed to put a halt on serious human rights violations taking place in Myanmar by the *Tatmadaw*.

More sustainable pathways: What is the role of international actors in this situation? How to make sure that private or donor-based interventions in Myanmar do not derail the democratization and peace process? As the recent UN report states the international community should systematically condemn the human rights violations, work to ensure that perpetrators are held to account, establish efficient sanctions and assist Myanmar in addressing the root causes of the recurrent violent conflicts (UN HRC 2018).

One part of the root causes relates to the questions of land, forest and water rights. The situation resembles that paradox of a chicken and an egg: sustainable use of natural resources is a condition for advancing peace whereas peace is required for making the transition from unsustainable extractivism to forms of land, forest and water use that generate well-being justly for all. Insofar as one is the condition of another, the progress needs to occur concurrently, side by side. Pasi Rajala reminded that non-action has also consequences, typically perpetuating the existing structures and practices. Glenn Hunt pointed out that international development actors should focus more on finding meaningful ways to support more sustainable and just land and forest tenure systems.

In the panel discussion, the speakers agreed that investments in key areas of production, distribution or transport infrastructures can contribute to advancing positive and more peaceful development. The question is more about the approaches and ways such development projects are carried out. Harn Yawngnaw gave an example of the derailed development: most of the population lack access to electricity and, at the same time, Myanmar is exporting electricity to its neighbouring countries. In other words, the population are being expelled from the grid connection – even though, as Kyi Phyo stressed, that electricity is needed now and not in a distant future. Kyi Phyo's explanation to such logic was in the mindsets of central planners who are used to finding large solutions and paying little attention to the complexities about the conditions how ethnic communities might benefit from growth. Thus, an alternative view is highly needed to avoid official development aid or private funding ending up in strengthening the mode of economic development that is beneficial to only those in power.

Concrete examples about Finland's future support in Myanmar were also given during the panel discussion. Juhani Klemetti highlighted that, in the current situation, supporting the emerging civil society is likely to advance democratization and peace process whereas there are risks with private-sector instruments. Khu Khu Ju and Kristiina Rintakoski proposed that Finland could lead the way in supporting processes or projects that would strengthen the possibilities of ethnic minorities to study in their own language. Kyi Phyo reminded that environmental and human right violations have been too often normalized through the concept of development.

4. Conclusions

These concluding remarks draw together the key lessons from the seminar discussions.

- 1) The seminar highlighted the importance of supporting the democratization of the governance of natural resources. Strengthening of the role of the recent national land use policy could be one avenue for this. The new policy is promising but the lack of political will for its implementation is a major problem. Support for processes that strengthen the recognition and protection of customary land and forest tenure rights of ethnic communities was encouraged. Such backing for sustainable rural livelihoods could allow Myanmar to transcend beyond its current unjust extractivist growth patterns.
- 2) The seminar encouraged approaching Myanmar as differently scaled networks of finance, investments, legal instruments and customary land use practices. On one hand, Finnish and other international actors are encouraged to support bottom up initiatives in order to avoid strengthening the expulsion of local communities or perpetuating the conflict by legitimizing state/military elites. On the other hand, it is important to take into consideration that the more just governance of natural resources cannot proceed only through grassroots. The national legislative framework structures the ways natural resources are negotiated and internationally promoted.
- 3) The key conundrum is about democratizing what can be called as unjust cease-fire capitalism and moving towards more inclusive economic development without catalysing further tensions and conflicts. Furthering such inclusive development draws attention to the existing processes of peace. All stakeholders should have equal access to these processes. Currently, this seems highly, even overtly challenging. Harn Yawngwe, however, commented that "one should not lose hope" and that negotiations are the only way forward. After 70 years of war and conflicts one cannot expect that the democratisation happens quickly.
- 4) Finally, the seminar highlighted that the civil society in Myanmar is active and relatively strong despite the authoritarian legacies of the military rule. In some cases, it is especially in the ethnic states where civil society initiatives have been responded. Thus, perpetuating conflicts and expanding extractivism is not the whole picture. The dynamic changes in Myanmar have also meant emergent spaces for more sustainable and equitable pathways.

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ANNEX 1: Programme of the Event

Conflicts and resource politics in Myanmar

15 August 2018, 10 am to 1:30 pm

Think Corner, University of Helsinki, Yliopistonkatu 4

Myanmar is experiencing a complicated process of transition towards a civilian government, multi-party democratic elections, and peace negotiations. At the same time, the recent opening of the country has resulted in an accelerating rush for the rich natural resources, including a boom in extractive industrial and agribusiness projects. Most of these resources are located in the ethnic states and many of the grievances of the various ethnic communities are entangled with the questions of access to and control over resources. In this event researchers, NGO representatives and social movement activists discuss the ways that land and other resource rights should be addressed as a part of conflict resolution towards sustainable peace in Myanmar. The recent political changes in Myanmar has also meant a rush of different international development organisations to the country. Recently also Finland has decided to focus its support in Southeast Asia to Myanmar. The event includes a panel discussion on the Finland's future role in Myanmar with perspectives from civil society, ministry officials and private sector.

9:30-10:00 Screening of documentary "This Land is Our Land", directed by Sai Kong Kham. Tagu Films, 2014.

10-12 Conflicts and resource politics in Myanmar: Presentations, comments and discussion.

Facilitator: **Mira Kähkönen** (University of Helsinki)

10:00 Opening words: **Mira Kähkönen**

10:05 **Glenn Hunt** (University of Bern, Land Core Group), *'Brief overview on the status of land and forest governance reform in Myanmar'*

Commentator: **Petri Wanner** (Ministry for Foreign Affairs)

10:30 **Khu Khu Ju** (Land in Our Hands, Transnational Institute), *'Land grabbing and advocacy in ethnic states: focus on Karen lands'*

Commentator: **Thuzar Thant** (Euro-Burma Office)

10:55 **Carl Middleton** (Chulalongkorn University), *'Resource (hydro)politics in the Salween river basin: implications for the peace negotiations'*

Commentator: **David Korpela** (Ministry for Foreign Affairs)

11:20 **Kyi Phyo** (Mekong Energy and Ecology Network), *'Energy politics and advocacy: focus on Shan state'*

Commentator: **Harn Yawngkhwe** (Euro-Burma Office)

12-13:25 Finland in Myanmar - the dynamics of aid and trade: Panel discussion.

Facilitator: **Niko Humalisto** (Felm)

Panellists: **Riikka Laatu** (Finland's Ambassador to Myanmar), **Esko Korkiakoski** (Geological Survey of Finland, GTK), **Pasi Rajala** (Finnfund), **Kristiina Rintakoski** (Felm), **Juhani Klemetti** (Siemenpuu)

13:25 Closing remarks: Hanna Matinpuro (Siemenpuu Foundation)

ANNEX 2: Short biographies of the invited foreign experts

Glenn Hunt is a PhD candidate at the University of Bern, Switzerland, and has until recently spent the last 4 plus year acting as the policy adviser to the Myanmar CSO, Land Core Group (LCG). LCG is one of the key CSOs working on land and forest governance reform issues in Myanmar, working closely with various land reform actors in Myanmar, including both ethnic and Burman CSOs in different parts of the country. Glenn has been working on land governance and land / forest tenure issues for the last 14 years, previously in Laos, before starting in Myanmar in 2014.

Khu Khu Ju is a land right activist and an activist researcher. In the past she has been the spokesperson for the Karen Human Rights Group. Currently she is dedicating most of her time to the work with Land in Our Hands network (LIOH). LIOH is an initiative of small-scale farmers and local farmer organizations that works for land tenure rights of small-scale farmers and fisherfolk, and particularly for women and ethnic communities. Khu Khu Ju has co-authored a report '[Meaning of Land in Myanmar](#)' published by the Transnational Institute.

Carl Middleton is Deputy Director for Research Affairs on the MA in International Development Studies (MAIDS) Program, and Director of the Center for Social Development Studies (CSDS), in the Faculty of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand. His research interests orientate around the politics and policy of the environment in Southeast Asia, with a particular focus on environmental justice and the political ecology of water and energy. He has recently completed several resource politics-related research projects in Myanmar, including on the Salween River and in Hakha town, Chin State.

Kyi Phyo is the Myanmar coordinator of the Mekong Energy and Ecology Network (MEE Net). In Myanmar several large-scale energy projects are being planned. Social movements have been successful in stopping some of the most destructive ones. Kyi Phyo has worked closely with grassroots activists and local residents in the Irrawaddy and Salween river basins building networks to confront destructive hydropower projects and to advocate for more just and sustainable ways of using the rivers. MEE Net also constructs alternative energy plans that have been influential, for example, in the Shan state.

Thuzar Thant is a Peace and Dialogue Program Manager of Euro-Burma Office based in Yangon, Myanmar. Since 2012 April, she has been working closely with various stakeholders engaged in the Myanmar peace process. She co-facilitated and coordinated the informal multi-stakeholders discussion series on the development framework for political dialogue. She served as a facilitator for the first Union Conference of Myanmar, the 21st Century Panglong Conference, and continues working with all stakeholders facilitating the 22 political parties that are participating in the Myanmar National Dialogue.

Harn Yawnghwe escaped from Burma to Thailand in 1963 after his father, Burma's first President Sao Shwe Thaik, was arrested in a coup d'état by General Ne Win. Harn's family was granted political asylum and moved to Canada in 1969 where he earned a mining engineering degree and an MBA from McGill University. From 1988, Harn was an active member of Burma's democracy movement. In 1990, Harn founded the Euro-Burma Office in 1997 in Brussels, to help the Burmese democracy movement prepare for a transition to democracy in Burma. In 2011, Harn was asked by the Govt of Myanmar and ethnic armed organizations to facilitate negotiations. After 48 years in exile, Harn returned to Myanmar to facilitate the peace process which resulted in 14 bilateral ceasefire agreements, and on 15 October 2015, a Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement was signed.